

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1633

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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TAGS: ELAB, PINT, HO

SUBJECT: LAND INVASIONS CONTINUE

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 4427, 4739

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE GOVERNMENT ANSWERED THE CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS' REQUEST FOR A MORE RAPID LAND DISTRIBUTION WITH A DECLARATION DESCRIBING WHAT THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO DO. THE DECLARATION STATES THAT THE ONLY AREA WHERE THERE IS LAND IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE IS IN THE NORTH, AND PROCEEDS TO OUTLINE THE STEPS NECESSARY TO DISTRIBUTE LAND IN THAT AREA. AN SERIES OF LAND INVASIONS IN VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS TOOK PLACE DURING THE NOVEMBER 1-4 PERIOD. THE CAMPESINO LEADERSHIP STATED THAT THE INVASIONS ARE SPONTANEOUS AND WERE NOT ORDERED BY THEIR MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR WILL ORDER THE ARMY TO DISLODGE THE INVADING CAMPESINOS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT REACTED TO THE CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS'

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DEMAND FOR MORE LAND BY ISSUING A DECLARATION ON OCT 30 SIGNED BY THE

ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM INSTITUTE (INA), VIRGELIO MADRID SOLIS. THE MAIN POINTS FOLLOW:

(A) THE GOVERNMENT IS AWARE OF THE NEED FOR LAND DISTRIBUTION AND THE CHIEF OF STATE HAS ORDERED INA AND OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO ACCELERATE IMMEDIATELY THE AGRARIAN REFORM PROCESS;

(B) THE ONLY AREA WHERE LAND CAN BE BROUGHT IMMEDIATELY INTO PRODUCTION IS IN THE NORTH. TO THAT END THE FOLLOWING STEPS SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT:

(1) TAKE ALL NECESSARY ACTIONS TO DISTRIBUTE LAND TO AS MANY CAMPESINOS AS POSSIBLE DURING NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER;

(2) FACILITATE THE PROCESSING OF AGRARIAN REFORM CLAIMS;

(3) CONSTRUCT A DRAINAGE CANAL TO PLACE IN PRODUCTION APPROXIMATELY 2,000 HECTARES IN EL PROGRESO AREA;

(4) OCCUPATION OF 930 HECTARES OF LAND IN RANCHO GUAYMAS AND DISTRIBUTION TO ALREADY SELECTED CAMPESINO GROUPS;

(5) EXPROPRIATE APPROXIMATELY 4,000 HECTARES OF LAND IN THE SAME AREA;

(6) RECUPERATE NATIONAL LAND THAT IS IN PRIVATE HANDS IN THE LEAN VALLEY AND OTHER AREAS; AND

(7) INSTRUCT THE NATIONAL BANK TO FACILITATE CREDITS FOR THOSE GROUPS WHICH HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED LAND;

(C) THE FOREGOING MEASURES WILL CONTRIBUTE TO RESOLVING URGENT PROBLEMS, BUT THE AGRARIAN PROCESS IS SLOW AND NOTHING CONSTRUCTIVE CAN BE GAINED IF IT IS NOT IN CONSONANCE WITH THE LAW; AND

(D) THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS THE FRANK AND DECIDED SUPPORT OF CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE CARRYING OUT OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM PROCESS.

2. A SERIES OF LAND INVASIONS IN VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS TOOK PLACE DURING THE NOVEMBER 1-4 PERIOD AND HAS RECEIVED GREAT PUBLICITY FROM THE MEDIA. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE NATIONAL FRONT OF UNITED CAMPESINOS (FNUC) DENIES THAT THEY ISSUED ORDERS FOR THE LAND INVASIONS, AND CONTEND THAT THEY HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT SPONTANEOUSLY BY CAMPESINOS WHO ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF LAND. THE FNUC LEADERSHIP IS COMPOSED OF THE LEADERS OF THE THREE LARGE CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS: ANACH, UNC AND FECORAH. THE PRESIDENT OF ANACH, REYES RODRIGUEZ AVEVALO, WAS WADELY QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO CAMPESINO DEMANDS HAD BEEN MINIMAL AND WAS NOT SUFFICIENT TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DEAL WITH GREAT NEED FOR LAND. HE SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH FNUC HAD NOT INSTIGATED THE INVASIONS, IT WAS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING THE CAMPESINOS' DEMANDS. FERNANDO LARDIZABAL, PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERATION OF CATTLEMEN AND LANDOWNERS (FENAGH), STATED THAT THE CAMPESINOS HAD BEEN DECEIVED BY THEIR LEADERS. HE SAID THAT IF THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT IMPOSE ITS AUTHORITY TO STOP THE INVASIONS, IT WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO DO SO. A MEETING TOOK PLACE ON NOVEMBER 3 BETWEEN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

AND THE NATIONAL AGRARIAN COUNCIL TO DISCUSS WAYS OF DEALING WITH THE SITUATION.

3. CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR HAD A MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF COHEP (COUNCIL OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE) ON NOVEMBER 3. AMONG OTHER MATTERS, THE ISSUE OF THE LAND INVASIONS WAS DISCUSSED. HE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE SITUATION IS MANAGABLE, AND REMARKED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD DECIDE IN THE NEAR FUTURE ON WHAT MEASURES TO TAKE. CAMILO RIVERA GIRON, PRESIDENT OF COHEP, TOLD REPORTERS THAT MELGAR HAD PROMISED THEM THAT CAMPESINOS WOULD BE EJECTED FROM INVADED LAND.

4. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT IS ON THE SPOT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE ILLEGAL LAND INVASIONS. CLEARLY THE MILITARY WOULD LIKE TO AVOID ACTIONS WHICH WOULD BRING THEM INCREASED UNPOPULARITY. HOWEVER, THE IMPLICATIONS OF TEMPORIZING WITH THE INVADING CAMPESINOS ARE CERTAINLY OBVIOUS TO MELGAR AND THE LT. COLONELS. THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO LET IT APPEAR THAT THEY ARE NOT ENFORCING "LAW AND ORDER"; A DEMONSTRATION OF UNCERTAINTY IN DEALING WITH THE INVADERS WOULD UNDERMINE THAT IMAGE IN SHORT ORDER. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT MELGAR WILL ORDER THE ARMY TO DISLODGE THE INVADING CAMPESINOS FROM THE AREAS THEY NOW OCCUPY, UNLESS THERE IS A SPECIFIC REASON FOR ALLOWING THEM TO REMAIN IN A GIVEN AREA.
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